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24-HOUR ROOM SERVICE

Blow Up Hall

Poznan, Poland

Is it a hotel, a shopping mall, or an art installation? Or is Blow Up Hall actually one of those curious optical illusions, all black-and-white lines and squares, where reality mutates unexpectedly out of the corner of your eye?

All of the above, is the answer – and more. Masterminded by the successful Polish businesswoman, art collector and philanthropist Grazyna Kulczyk, the hotel lurks, like a secret chamber, in a corner of Poznan's impressive Stary Browar complex. Within the walls of this old, red-brick brewery – in an area once considered a derelict no-go zone – are now stylish shopping halls, exhibition spaces, and Poland's only contemporary dance centre.

Upon arrival, guests are greeted in a giant entrance hall at the foot of a grand flight of stairs, which leads up to the cocktail bar (New York slick at eye-level, original oast house towering above), terrace and back entrance to the mall. There is no front desk, nor are there room numbers. iPods are proffered, yours for the duration of your stay; a black lift takes you to a black corridor, lined with black doors. When the correct button is pressed on the iPod, a screen lights up next to your room, and the door opens automatically.

Essentially, the entire complex functions as an extravagant home for Kulczyk's ex-

tensive collection of modern art. The design centrepiece of the hotel is an interactive, pixellated work of art by the acclaimed Mexican-Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer – interactive in the sense that the pixels reflect your movement below it. Armchairs and sofas are black and geometric; in the all-white dining room (the food is nouvelle Polish, and very good) is an angular room divider that reminds me of a Rubik's Cube.

A spa and modern art museum are imminent additions to the complex.

LOCATION

Blow Up Hall 5050, ul Kosciuszki 42, Poznan, Poland (00 48 61 657 99 80; blowuphall5050.com). If you exit the hotel via the mall, you find yourself in old Poznan, which survived the occupation of Prussia, of the German Empire and of the Nazis. A park lies in the shadow of the brewery walls, ringed by grand apartments in various states of disrepair. Five minutes away is the glorious old square, so well renovated that it's hard to believe how much was destroyed by the Red Army's advance on Berlin.

Time from international airport: Poznan-Lawica is 15 minutes from the hotel by taxi, and is served by the low-cost carriers Wizz and Ryanair.

COMFORTABLE?

Luxury meets austerity in each of the 22 unique rooms. Aside from one purple room, the colour scheme is monochrome. Bathrooms are gen-

erous: mine had a square marble bath, big enough for two; a companion's had the shower on display in the corner of the bedroom. (It resembled a glassed-in DJ booth.) Small copies of the Blow Up pixel centrepiece are exhibited on the built-in screen in the wall outside each room – and on the giant rotating flat screen inside.

Freebies: Molton Brown toiletries.

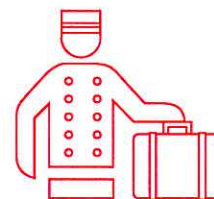
Keeping in touch: naturally, an iPhone comes with your room. The idea is that guests can call the concierge from anywhere in town, check emails and send texts using the free Wi-Fi connection, and access pre-loaded tourist information, music and films. It still early days, however (the hotel opened in March), and on my visit they were having teething problems.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Double rooms start at €300, including breakfast.

I'm not paying that: a private room with bath in the styled-out Fusion Hostel & Hotel (00 48 61 852 12 30; fusion-hostel.pl) costs from PLN 80 (£16) per person.

TAM LEACH



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